

Hopewell Applies For \$200,000 DCA Grant

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Bridgeton News**

HOPEWELL TWP. -- The township committee at its regular meeting Wednesday voted unanimously to apply for \$200,000 in Small Cities Community Block Grants from the New Jersey Division of Community Affairs.

The grants would go toward rehabilitating houses belonging to low- to moderate-income residents.

Mayor Harold Bickings and Committeeman Duane Cruzan were absent from the meeting, and did not vote.

The Small Cities housing grants would provide \$5,000 to \$20,000 for core property maintenance for eligible households, said Jud Moore, township grant writer.

According to Moore, single people making \$31,500 a year or less would be eligible to receive money from the grant for home repairs.

Five-member families can earn up to \$48,000 a year and still remain eligible.

The grants would only be available for homeowners, and does not cover residences that are rented.

"There are senior citizens and people on fixed incomes that cannot afford things like septic system or roof repairs," said Moore. "These grants would help them afford such things."

Currently, low and moderate income residents have to seek help from the county, which only offers an emergency program, to receive help with property maintenance.

Upper Deerfield and Downe Township each have their own similar grant program, said Moore.

If the application is approved, the township would have to match 10 percent of the \$200,000 -- or \$20,000 -- to cover administration costs.

"The program would work hand-in-hand with the homeowner," said Moore. "A work write-up would go to four to six different contractors, and the job would go to the lowest bidder."

After the homeowner signs off on the deal, the contractor has 30 days to begin, said Moore. The job must be done within 60 days. The contractor does not receive any pay until the job is done.

"I think this would benefit more citizens in the municipality than we think we have," said Committeeman Joe Shoemaker. "If the state (Department of Environmental Protection) were to require all septic systems be inspected, which costs around \$17,000 to replace, it would help out a lot of people with that terrible burden."

In addition to maintenance, the grants would cover house-wide lead inspections for all interior jobs. However, Moore said window repairs would only require a lead inspection of the area around the window.

If the application is approved, Moore would serve as project director and receive a fee of \$900 per case.

"I only take what the state mandates, and that's the state rate," said Moore.

According to Moore, the township will not hear if the application was approved until late November or December.

"It's important to point out that it was only a vote to apply for the grant," said Township Clerk Ted Ritter. "They can still turn us down."

Also announced at Wednesday night's meeting, Sept. 12 will now be known as William Freitag Jr. Day in Hopewell Township. Freitag, an aspiring Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America, landscaped the area around the township municipal building. The job was done free of charge using donated equipment and labor.